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TASS

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TASS

I. Survey of TASS Functions

A. News Agency

TASS (Telegrafnoye Agentstvo SSSR), the central news agency of the Soviet Union, supplies news coverage for the newspapers of the USSR. Its daily file runs to about one million words transmitted by radio, telephone, wireless teletypewriter, Hellschreiber, cable and mail. 1/ TASS collects news in the USSR mostly through the telegraphic agencies of the several Soviet republics. These are regional agencies subordinate to TASS and subject to its control. TASS features articles on events within the USSR are either reprints and re-writes of editorials and articles in leading Moscow organs, or Party-directed propaganda pieces for the smaller newspapers.

The activity of TASS within the USSR, despite the attribute of "exclusive" of the 1935 charter (Section 1, No. 5 of the Laws and Decrees of the Workers and Peasants Government of the USSR), 2/ is paralleled by that of Pravda, Izvestia, Trud, Komsomol'skaya Pravda, Krasnaya Zvezda and other All-Union (central) newspapers. They have their own correspondents within the country, independently of TASS. 3/ These All-Union newspapers account for 40 percent of the total newspaper circulation in the USSR. 4/ In addition, Pravda has a Press Bureau which disseminates its material directly to many smaller provincial newspapers, without going through TASS. 5/ However, TASS disseminates Pravda's lead editorial daily to lesser newspapers not reached by the Pravda Press Bureau. Thus, although TASS plays a major role in the collection and dissemination of domestic news within the USSR, its role is not exclusive.

TASS appears to have a more controlling role in the collection of news abroad and its dissemination in Russia, although Pravda, Trud, Radio Moscow, Izvestia and Komsomol'skaya Pravda have their own correspondents in a number of countries abroad. It is the primacy of TASS in the collection of foreign news, however, that places it among the leading international news agencies.

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There is little resemblance between TASS and the western news agencies due to the peculiar characteristics and propaganda requirements of the Soviet press. The energy and capital expended by the Soviet Government on propaganda, both domestic and foreign, go far beyond the normal efforts of western countries to obtain support for their policies. 6/

This conditions the working methods of the TASS correspondents abroad. They are notorious for their lack of interest in a whole range of subjects which are considered news in the Free World. TASS correspondents rarely attempt to initiate news or run down leads. They rely heavily on pick-ups from local newspapers, official conferences or handouts and on social contacts with other foreign correspondents. There are indications that summaries and analyses of news coverage and editorial content of the foreign press constitute a large part of the TASS traffic. TASS correspondents also perform a foreign-news-monitoring service similar to that performed by FBIS and USIS.

The limited interest in news is reflected by the failure of TASS offices to exploit fully the teletype services of the western news agencies which are available to them. Although this may partly be explained by the fact that these wire services also are directly available at Moscow headquarters of TASS, where all the editing and final re-writing is done, the bulk of the news disseminated by the western agencies is never published in the Soviet press.

Now the propaganda requirements of the USSR condition the operating methods of the Soviet correspondents has been indicated by TASS Director N.O. Paiganov, who wrote: 7/

"News must be organized, else it is news of mere events and happenings.... News must not merely throw light on this or that fact or event--it must pursue a definite purpose.... News is agitation via facts. In selecting a news topic, the writer of the news story must proceed above all from the realization that not all facts and not just any event should be reported in the press."

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B. Agency of Soviet Government

TASS, in addition to its function as a news agency, is an arm of the Soviet Government, under the control of the CPSU. As such it has intelligence and propaganda responsibilities abroad and serves as a support group for other branches of the government with responsibilities in the foreign relations field.

TASS positions abroad are used by the Russian Intelligence Service as legal case-officer cover for clandestine agent operations. Of the 70 Soviet nationals who were identified as TASS personnel stationed abroad on 1 January 1959,* 60 percent (42 persons) appear to have been identified in some degree as RIS staff personnel. Of these, 18 have been further identified as possible State security and intelligence service (KGB) personnel, and seven as possible military intelligence service (GRU) personnel. Although based on incomplete identifications, there seem to be indications that GRU slotting in TASS is heavier in western Europe, where TASS is primarily a news collecting agency, and that conversely the KGB outweighs the GRU in areas where TASS dissemination functions predominate.

The cover potential afforded by TASS is severely limited numerically. The total number of Soviet nationals representing TASS abroad does not amount to more than 100, or less than 3 percent of the more than 3,500 diplomatic and official positions occupied by Soviet nationals abroad.

It has been observed in Scandinavia that TASS correspondents do two types of reporting: (1) production of pieces for publication in the USSR press; and (2) compilation of objective news and data not intended for publication, but disseminated confidentially among selected government and Party officials. If an RIS officer is under TASS cover, of course, he also drafts reports on clandestine operations. There are indications that this is the pattern of TASS correspondents' activity in many parts of the world.

* See Appendix A.

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In the underdeveloped and former colonial areas of the Free World, TASS foreign correspondents and representatives act as channels through which Soviet printed propaganda is disseminated to editors and publishers. TASS representatives do not have dissemination functions in most of western Europe or in North America, although more than half of the Soviet nationals representing TASS are in those areas.

As an agency of the Soviet Government, TASS is able to offer its services either free of charge or for a nominal fee in contradistinction to commercially organized agencies such as AP, UPI or Reuters. 8/ On some occasions TASS has even subsidized publication of its material by paying for it on an advertising basis. This method of operating has given TASS a marked advantage in the underdeveloped countries of Africa and Asia where lack of funds makes the acquisition of news difficult.

Although TASS representatives do not function as channels for the dissemination of copy in western Europe and North America, they probably do help supply the Communist-controlled or influenced press in those areas with free copy and propaganda material. In such cases it is frequently printed without attribution.

TASS has considerable influence on the news sent by the Western press from Moscow because censorship and restrictions on the movement of foreign correspondents make TASS the only complete source of detailed, daily news from within the USSR available to the world press.

TASS also serves as a semi-official spokesman for the USSR in its foreign relations. 9/ This role places limits on the freedom of action of TASS in the foreign propaganda field. Compared with the distorted hate news that it feeds to the newspapers in the more remote parts of Russia, TASS disseminations to the Western press are strikingly factual and sober in tone.

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C. Document Procurement Agency

TASS also functions as a foreign document and economic data procurement agency for other branches of the Soviet Government. It has been observed that the Soviet United Nations Delegation in the US and the Soviet Embassy in Washington regularly place procurement orders for American publications with TASS. Soviet trade agencies have occasionally asked TASS to secure industrial specifications and bid-data from American manufacturers.

This confidential intelligence procurement activity is not, however, clandestine and is not a major part of TASS functions in the US. It is possible that this function is peculiar to the US and other countries where the political climate has induced Soviet diplomatic and trade agency personnel to secure the help of TASS.

Senior TASS personnel are very close to the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Many have started as diplomatic representatives while others have switched from TASS to the foreign service.

Despite all the varied and important functions of TASS, it is not as close to the center of power as Pravda, Izvestia or even Trud. Shepilov, Suslov and Pospelov have been senior editors of Pravda. A chief editor of the trade union daily, Trud, served as chairman of the important Agitprop Section of the Central Committee of the CPSU. 10/ No director or deputy director of TASS had this political stature. Even though an essential function of TASS is editorializing and slanting the news it collects, it does not have the freedom of decision that Pravda or Izvestia exercise in this field. The editors of the All-Union newspapers appear to have more direct connections with the Agitprop Section. The editorial responsibilities of the director of TASS are administrative and technical rather than policy-making in nature.

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II. Extent of TASS Operations

A. Personnel

In 1954 the total number of correspondents employed by TASS was between 800 and 850. ^{11/} Of these, about 200 were stationed outside the USSR. Of the remainder, not all were under the direct jurisdiction of TASS. An undetermined number were employees of 14 of the separate news agencies maintained by the union republics of the USSR. These 14 agencies are under the supervision and control of TASS at a high policy level only. TASS is the news agency of the biggest and most important of the 15 union republics, the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (RSFSR). The RSFSR, whose capital is Moscow, embraces 77 percent of the area, 56 percent of the population and 70 percent of the industry of the USSR. The number of TASS-RSFSR correspondents probably is proportionately as great and TASS may, therefore, have jurisdiction over 400 of the 600-650 Soviet news agency correspondents within the USSR.

The 200 foreign correspondents of TASS are stationed in countries of the non-Communist world, plus the countries of the Sino-Soviet Bloc. It is believed that this number given by Palgunov ^{12/} includes non-Soviet native employees and that the total number of Soviet nationals representing TASS abroad does not exceed 100. The basis for this estimate is the appended identification list of Soviet nationals abroad as employees and representatives on 1 January 1959.*

This list totals only 70 names. Missing from it are the names of TASS representatives probably stationed in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, Albania, North Korea and North Viet Nam. The listing for China may be incomplete. East Germany and Yugoslavia, however, are fully accounted for. As a matter of proportion between the number of known representatives and the unknown, 100 would seem to be a reasonable maximum estimate for the total number of Soviet nationals employed by TASS abroad.

* See appendix A.

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The total number of TASS employees is believed to be about 2,000, although there is no firm evidence for this estimate. It is based on the assumption that there may be at least two support employees for each correspondent, on the Paigunov statement that 35 percent of headquarters personnel were employed by the Communications Department 13/, and on analogy with other news agencies.

B. Volume of Traffic

In 1954, domestic and foreign TASS correspondents filed a daily average of between 670,000 and 700,000 words, while the average distributed to clients was between 217,000 and 225,000. 14/ Most of the news came from abroad. The domestic news file averaged only about 20,000 to 24,000 words a day. 15/ This indicates that the main responsibility of TASS is to provide foreign news.

The fact that 75 percent of TASS correspondents are employed in the USSR is at variance with the preponderance of foreign news over the domestic variety. There are a number of possible reasons for this. The news received by TASS from foreign news agencies may alter the balance between foreign and domestic output, or the domestic reporters may be engaged in collecting news that is not destined for dissemination.

C. Budget

TASS does not publish any budget figures and refused to supply any when UNESCO was preparing its 1953 study News Agencies: Structure and Operations. However, TASS director Paigunov indicated in a 1955 interview with former Senator William Benton that the TASS annual budget was two and one-half times that of Agence France Presse and less than that of the Associated Press. 16/ On the basis of the above-mentioned UNESCO study, which gave the AP budget for 1951 as \$24,693,645 and that of AFP as about \$7,400,000, it would seem that the TASS budget was about \$18,000,000. 17/

In this interview Paigunov denied that TASS receives any government subsidy and affirmed that it operates on the subscriptions it receives from client newspapers. 18/ However,

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this is doubtful because it is a fairly well accepted fact that the Soviet regime subsidizes the various communications media although the amount is not known. Money derived from subscribers would not be sufficient to cover expenses. 12/

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III. Organization of TASS in USSR

The editorial functions of TASS in the USSR are shared by eight departments, four of which handle the collection and dissemination of foreign and domestic news while the others are special feature or editorial service departments. In addition, there are three physical operations departments, one for communications and two for circulation, plus administrative and support units.

A. Four General Editorial Offices

1. INOTASS

The News-from-Abroad Office (INOTASS - Redaktsiya inostrannoy informatsii TASS) is the largest and most important of the editorial departments. Palgunov states that it is the largest department in the central TASS office, 20/ but he gives no statistics and introduces a somewhat puzzling note by saying that "the Communications Department includes 35 percent of the total central office personnel." 21/ If more than 70 percent of the personnel of the TASS central office were employed in these two departments, then the strength of the other departments would be unbelievably small.

INOTASS is apparently organized on an area-desk basis. A large part of the incoming copy is foreign language material. Translation is done in the area branch where the copy is edited. Language experts are attached to the area branches and the editors on these desks are required to have a working knowledge of the languages of the area for which they are responsible.

All TASS correspondents abroad are controlled by INOTASS, whose primary responsibility is the collection of foreign news. However, its rewrite and editorial functions are important and include the conversion of such foreign news into propaganda suitable for publication in the USSR as well as the preparation of more objective news files for confidential dissemination in restricted government and Party circles. 22/

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It is not known whether INOTASS has any responsibility for training TASS correspondents, such as the Domestic News Office (RSI) has for domestic correspondents.

2. RSI

The Domestic News Office (RSI - Redaktsiya sovuznoy informatsii) is next in importance among TASS editorial departments. Like INOTASS, RSI is primarily a news-gathering rather than a news dissemination department. It is responsible for the operations of about 400 domestic correspondents who are under the direct control of TASS. This responsibility includes the training and evaluation of all TASS domestic correspondents. RSI supervises the work of the news agencies of 14 Soviet Union Republics, but its control functions are probably slight since TASS authority over the separate republic agencies is limited, formal and exercised only through top echelon channels. However, RSI is the primary news-gathering agency for the biggest and most important of the union republics, the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic.

The importance of the two news-gathering offices, RSI and INOTASS, has been reinforced since 1954 when the editorial offices for disseminating news to the Soviet press and to the international press were integrated and presumably made subordinate to RSI and INOTASS respectively. This accords with the dominant character of TASS as a technical news-collection apparatus and with its subordinate editorial role in the Soviet propaganda machine.

The RSI disseminates its news file directly to the All-Union newspapers and to many of the larger republic and provincial dailies. But this news file is not the ultimate propaganda re-write. The finished product is prepared by the editors of the All-Union newspapers, particularly the editors of Pravda, who lead the Soviet Press in implementing the propaganda directives of the CPSU.

3. RIDZ

The Office for Dissemination to the Foreign Press (RIDZ - Redaktsiya informatsii dlya zagranitsy) has no domestic or foreign correspondents, other than a few reporters

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in Moscow to assure the prompt dissemination of government and Party news releases. The RIM processes the news files of INOTASS and RSI to make them suitable for its customers and also translates the reports into foreign languages. It has a large staff of expert translators. In 1954, this office was integrated into INOTASS, presumably in a subordinate status. 23/

4. RIMP

The Office for Dissemination to the Local Press (RIMP - Redaktsiya informatsii dlya mestnoy pechati) is responsible for supplying TASS material in relatively finished form to the lesser newspapers below the All-Union, republic and provincial level. RIMP also has extensive translating responsibilities for the small newspapers in the USSR which appear in 119 languages. 24/ The important All-Union and the larger republic and provincial newspapers are not supplied by RIMP, but by RSI.

The integration of RIMP as a subordinate element within the RSI in November 1954 reflects the declining importance of the smaller newspapers in the USSR in recent years. The circulation of the All-Union newspapers alone, not counting the larger republic and provincial dailies, has grown from 30 to 40 percent of the entire newspaper circulation in the USSR in the past seven years. 25/

Plastic matrices of the central newspapers are being flown to an increasing number of cities throughout the USSR for local reproduction. Pravda is now published in 15 major cities, Izvestia in 13 and Komsomolskaya in six. 26/ This has resulted in a greater centralization of editorial control, which has been outside TASS and at the expense of the RIMP unit.

It is indicative of the subordinate position of RIMP and TASS in the propaganda field that RIMP is charged with circulating lead articles and editorials from Pravda and other All-Union newspapers to those local newspapers of the USSR which are too small for the Press Bureau of Pravda to bother with.

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B. Four Special Editorial Service Offices

1. TASS Photo Service

The TASS Photo Service maintains a staff of photographers in major cities throughout the USSR. It also has a staff of roving photographers, some of whom are sent abroad on special assignments. In 1953, it disseminated 27,000 photos and it has a morgue of some 80,000 negatives. 27/ It maintains contractual relationships with foreign news picture services, essentially for procurement purposes. Sovfoto has been identified as a distributing agency for TASS Photo Service pictures abroad. 28/

2. TASS Press Bureau

The TASS Press Bureau produces, or procures from outside writers, special feature articles for dissemination among the smaller newspapers of the USSR. About 1,000 articles of this type are disseminated each year and they are mainly concerned with ideology or foreign affairs. 29/ The Press Bureau and RBP supplement each other in supplying the smaller newspapers with features and editorials. The Press Bureau appears to be a channel for Agitprop-directed disseminations 30/ to the more primitive sections of the Soviet press 31/, while RBP serves as a channel for extending the dissemination of Pravda and other All-Union editorial materials to the outermost corners of the Soviet newspaper system.

3. Press Cliche Office

The Press Cliche Office prepares plastic matrices for the printing of entire pages for thousands of lesser newspapers in the USSR. This relieves the newspapers of the necessity of setting up type for articles written in Moscow.

The Press Cliche Office is a technical service section and is dependent on RBP, the Press Bureau and the Photo Service Office for the material it uses. It is nevertheless classed as an editorial office rather than a purely technical service because its decisions in matters of layout, format and

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styling are editorially significant and constitute a reduction of freedom of choice of local editors. Its services strengthen central control over the editorial policy of the thousands of lesser newspapers in the Soviet system. In November 1954, the Press Cliche Office was integrated with the Photo Service Office. 32/

4. Radio Information Office

It is believed that TASS maintains a special radio information office for direct news dissemination to Radio Moscow and its affiliates. 33/ Palgunov states that it is part of the Communications Department which has no editorial responsibilities.

C. Other Organizational Elements

1. Communications Department

The Communications Department handles daily more than one million words of copy for the TASS system. It operates many of the communications facilities used by TASS in Russia and adjacent countries such as radio and wireless stations and teletype and telegraph lines. 34/

Since most TASS traffic moves over facilities not exclusively controlled by TASS, the Communications Department acts as a liaison element in ascertaining TASS requirements. Some of these relationships are governed by official decree. The Council of Ministers sets the rates for transmission costs for TASS and the several Soviet Republic telegraph agencies. 35/ An agreement between the Ministry of Communications and TASS stipulates that governmental communications have priority over all others, regardless of how they are transmitted. An exception is made when TASS or other news agency communications are carrying the texts of governmental decrees. 36/

2. The Two Circulation Departments

Palgunov reports the existence of two circulation or distribution departments, 37/ one for the larger newspapers and one for the smaller. They appear to be responsible for the delivery of mats, cuts or documents that have to be hand-carried from TASS to the clients.

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3. Auxiliary Departments

Palgunov lumps together under this designation "planning and finance, administration, foreign reference department, domestic reference department, auditing, etc." No further information is available concerning these elements.

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IV. Control and Coordination of TASS

The Director of TASS and his deputies are formally responsible to the Council of Ministers by whom they are ostensibly appointed. However, informed sources believe that the Agitprop Section of the CPSU Central Committee is really the controlling element. 38/

This method of control was undoubtedly chosen to make it impossible for any single ministry to dominate and exploit TASS for its own purposes. In this, TASS resembles the Sivinform Bureau and GLAVLET (Main Administration for Safeguarding Military and State Secrets), which are formally responsible to the Council of Ministers and not to any particular ministry.

Although Agitprop probably functions as the coordination and control center for domestic publication policies, the Foreign Section, or other body, of the Central Committee, CPSU, is possibly more directly concerned in the direction and supervision of TASS.

V. TASS and the RIS

Many TASS positions abroad are being used by the Russian intelligence services, KGB and GRU, as cover for intelligence officers. ■ identifications among TASS personnel stationed abroad as of 1 January 1959 indicate that TASS is a favored RIS cover mechanism. However, since there are only some 100 TASS slots available abroad the agency's use as cover is relatively restricted in comparison to the number of other official slots available for legal cover. 25X1A8a

A case in point was the well-known Andersen case in 1951 in Stockholm. Andersen was a Swedish army officer who supplied military information about Swedish coast defenses to a Russian case officer, Viktor Anisimov, a GRU operator under TASS cover.

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There may be a correlation between TASS and RIS functions in the propaganda field. The activity of Grigoriy Gerasimovich Yefimov, at present Secretary for Public Information in the Soviet Embassy in New Delhi, but who went to India as a TASS correspondent in October 1954, is suggestive. His activities include the expanded Soviet propaganda drive, liaison with Communist leaders in Ceylon and Kerala, 39/ and alleged participation in the planning and preparation of para-military projects. 40/

TASS correspondents operating in the non-Communist world gravitate to indigenous Communist and left-wing journalistic circles and their offices are largely staffed by such persons.

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